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Freya Grünhagen  
Tobias Koepf (eds.)

**The changing global order –  
Which role for  
the European Union?**





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# Introduction

Since 2008, Stiftung Genshagen and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung have jointly hosted a format for young foreign policy experts from France, Germany and Poland, now named »Weimar Young Perspectives« (WYP). The aim of this series is to bring together a small group of talented people at the start of their professional careers in politics, administration, business and academia to debate relevant and controversial foreign policy issues, develop new ideas for tackling these issues and foster an expert network between the three countries.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> edition of the format, which took place in Berlin and Genshagen from 21–23 November 2018 and was entitled »The new global strategic instability: What answers from Europe and the Weimar Triangle?«, a small group of security and defence policy experts looked at the latest developments on the global strategic stage, and specifically at the room for manoeuvre Europe has for shaping these developments. In recent years, the global strategic environment has changed significantly, and not necessarily for the better. The relationship between the US and other major global powers such as Russia and China, and also other influential regional players such as Iran, North Korea, India, Pakistan, Israel and Saudi Arabia has become more complex and conflictual. Europe has certainly been confronted with the consequences of these global power shifts, but has so far only played a minor role in this new concert of powers. At an intensive two-day workshop, the participants of the 2018 WYP endeavoured to assess the scope Europe has for influencing global politics with the means at its disposal.

In this publication, we would like to share the assessments of three of these young experts regarding Europe's current global role. Anna-Lena Kirch, a Research Associate at the Centre for International Security Policy (CISP) at the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin, focuses mainly on the inner workings of the European Union (EU) and its challenges for finding any sort of coherent strategic approach due to the different global positions and aspirations of its member states. Morgan Paglia, Research Fellow at the Institut français des relations internationales (Ifri) in Paris, comes to a more optimistic conclusion and sees global strategic instability as a window of opportunity for finding a new role as a security and defence actor. He argues, however, that Europe needs to invest more in its military capabilities to achieve at least some kind of »strategic autonomy«. Finally, Friederike Richter, a researcher at the Centre for Political Research (CEVI-POF) at Sciences Po Paris, also calls on the EU to further improve its capabilities, and most of all to stay firm in defending the principle of multilateralism, which is currently being called into question from different sides.

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**Tobias Koepf and Freya Grünhagen**

Berlin, September 2019

# I.

## The EU's role on the global stage: Multi-level fragmentation and absence of strategic direction

Anna-Lena Kirch

In mid-2019, political commentators and analysts all over the globe seem to ascribe to the observation that the world is upside down. Multilateralism has been further weakened and undermined. International agreements and alliances are fragile. Collective challenges – be they related to climate change, global health threats or military conflicts – are increasingly being assessed by applying national cost-benefit analyses, further reducing the likelihood that the respective public goods can be provided through coordinated and effective approaches to governance. The fact that all of these developments are being fuelled, rather than countered, by US president Donald Trump, who appears to look at international politics through a »zero sum« and »tit for tat« lens when it comes to the added value of multilateralism, international alliances and political agreements in a broader sense, is particularly worrying from a European perspective. The announcement to withdraw US troops from Syria and Afghanistan without informing – leave alone consulting – US allies is only the most recent addition to a long list of examples.

### Structural weakness and diverging strategic cultures and threat perceptions

These developments have once again revealed the EU's unique characteristics – and in many cases outright weaknesses – as a foreign policy actor and global player: its strong reliance on a rules-based global order, dependence on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the US in particular as a security provider, a tendency to react to events rather than taking the lead in shaping policy and political polyphony that often results in unpredictable, mixed messages from Brussels

and EU capitals. In short, the EU is not in a position to act strategically, speak with one voice and fill the void that the US will likely leave on the global stage and in the European neighbourhood. This is not to say that the EU or European coalitions of the willing do not matter or cannot have an impact going forward, but the EU currently has to juggle too many external and internal crises at the same time.

As already described above, the external security challenges and threats are manifold. The European neighbourhood remains a source of destabilisation owing to violent and frozen conflict as well as terrorist threats. Northern Africa and the Middle East in particular serve as arenas for proxy wars, including third actors such as Russia, Turkey, Iran and China. The EU is confronted with asymmetric warfare, for example in the cyber realm. Arms control must be revitalised and climate change and global health risks need to be tackled. Against the backdrop of a challenged liberal international order and a global context dominated by instability, it is crucial to understand why the EU's capacity to function as a global actor is so limited. There are structural factors and also more recent political developments and crises at the EU level and the domestic level of EU member states that are putting EU resources and the EU's ability to act strategically under severe strain.

The long-term structural limitations of EU security and defence policy are well known. The heterogeneity of EU member states and their foreign and security policy interests often result in lowest common denominator positions. In other cases, EU positions are precluded altogether, for example with regard to Saudi Arabia following the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Threat perceptions and path dependencies are strongly divergent among EU member states due to factors such

as geography, history, industrial structure and strategic culture. The narrative of strengthening the EU's strategic autonomy vis-à-vis the US is a good example of a divisive position. Mainly pushed by actors in France and to some extent Germany, this is far from shared by the EU as a whole. Countries such as Poland and the three Baltic states do not see an alternative to a strong alliance with the US – due to geopolitical and historical reasons – and continue to consider NATO to be the preferred framework and security guarantee, despite the fact that Trump has openly questioned the alliance at times. Another example is the traditional divide between East and South when it comes to threat perceptions. Unified EU responses are thus difficult to achieve. Moreover, EU member states differ with regard to their strategic cultures and path dependencies. Germany's stance on security and defence policy, for example, is still strongly influenced by a reticent public opinion with regard to military missions abroad. Closely related to Germany's preferred role as a mediator, the German government tends rather to advocate inclusive approaches and mechanisms to European security and defence while France or the UK have preferred unilateral and thus more flexible formats. This Franco-German antagonism could, for instance, be observed in the early conceptual discussion on Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO).

### **More reactive, ad hoc and inward looking**

As a result of these external and internal factors, European foreign, security and defence policies have been mostly reactive and ad hoc. The EU does not have a global strategy that reflects the current international context and disintegrative dynamics. The EU

Global Strategy, presented in June 2016, was put together before the Brexit referendum and before Trump was elected US President. As a result, it is in many ways already outdated and not fit to respond to the situation of unreliable transatlantic relations as well as EU capabilities and resources post-Brexit. This lack of a grand strategy combined with structural weaknesses of EU foreign and security policy is also reflected in the discourse on the EU's Common Security and Defence policy (CSDP). It remains unclear what CSDP wants to achieve and which reforms are necessary to get there. The integrative process of PESCO with its strong input orientation underlines this dilemma very well. The discourse has not been driven by the question as to what the EU should be able to deliver in the medium to long term in order to achieve its goals, but by areas in which individual member states are willing and able to deliver and to cooperate in order to strengthen capabilities and complementarity.

Looking ahead and taking into consideration the current outlook of EU politics and the status quo in the EU's biggest member states, the picture becomes even more complex and gloomy.

The EU is very much preoccupied with internal problems. First of all, Brexit negotiations and the constitutional crisis the UK is undergoing remain a source of unpredictability as the scenario of a hard Brexit still cannot be ruled out. The UK leaving the EU will have a particularly negative impact on the EU's global role going forward, as the EU loses one of its major military powers, a huge set of capabilities and a vast network of diplomatic representations. Moreover, Brexit negotiations have already effectively showcased once more the EU's weaknesses in acting strategically. The failure to reach a compromise between the EU and the UK on how to continue military cooperation on the Galileo

satellite navigation system sent profoundly negative signals – both to the EU’s allies and its competitors. In other words, it is far from safe to say that the EU and the UK will manage to act upon their joint interests in the area of security and defence post-Brexit even though both sides emphasise the existence of straightforward joint interests. There is likely to be a growing impression that the EU or EU coalitions of the willing cannot act autonomously any time soon or step up their international engagement in international security.

Secondly, and closely related to Brexit, the dynamic between EU member states has been shifting visibly since 2015. While the above-mentioned structural impediments to unified EU positions in the realm of security and defence are not at all a new phenomenon, the discourse in the EU has been shifting towards a more confrontational tone. The »no alternative« narrative that characterised the EU discourse during the European economic and sovereign debt crisis has come to an end. Especially German positions are challenged more openly and regularly than was the case a couple of years ago. Smaller countries – especially but not only in Central and Eastern Europe – are pursuing their interests more self-confidently and do not hesitate to build coalitions against Germany or the Franco-German tandem if necessary.

Moreover, the European elections in May 2019 have resulted in considerable losses for the two biggest political groups – the European People’s Party (EPP) and the Socialists & Democrats (S&D) – and gains for anti-European parties such as the Italian Lega and Alternative for Germany, both members of the Identity and Democracy Group (ID), which is the successor of the European Nations and Freedom Group (ENF). After the elections, the EPP holds 182 seats (formerly 219) and

S&D holds 153 seats (formerly 189) while ID now holds 73 seats (formerly 34 as ENF). The fragmentation of EU politics will thus likely increase and the tone of the Brussels discourse will become more controversial and polemic. Even though the European Parliament, formally speaking, does not play a major role in EU foreign, security and defence policy, a more anti-European parliament will nevertheless hamper proactive EU initiatives and far-reaching reforms.

### **No strategic long-term approach to be expected any time soon**

Given all these variables, policy analysts who argued in recent weeks and months that the EU »simply« has to start speaking with one voice therefore greatly overestimate the current potential for compromise and the capacity to act upon EU strategies towards politicised policy issues or crisis management. As a matter of fact, decisive leadership impulses are currently not to be expected from any of the major EU member states. All the big players are, in one way or another, restrained by domestic political conflicts or budgetary limitations, resulting in more inward-looking discourses. Since 2018, the German government has been in a state of limbo and paralysis with regard to future foreign policy commitments – due to the protracted process of forming a government in 2017 and 2018 and ongoing inter-party conflicts that make the Grand Coalition of Social Democrats and Christian Democrats appear very fragile. Looking ahead, it remains to be seen if the Merkel government will manage to revert to full working mode. Another limitation results from the analysis that Germany’s military capabilities are not sufficient with respect to enhancing German leadership on security and defence policies – provided the political

willingness is there. France finds itself in an equally critical situation. Protests by the »yellow vests« and the December 2018 terrorist attack in Strasbourg have forced French President Emmanuel Macron to focus on domestic challenges. His political room for manoeuvre at the EU level will thus likely remain limited in the months to come due to strong contestation of his policies and his leadership style within France. In addition, the four biggest EU member states are engaged in conflicts with each other – as in the case of Poland and France – or with the EU – as in the case of Italy and Poland. Their leadership potential is therefore very limited.

These multiple challenges will likely prevent the EU and its member states from dealing with more structural long-term challenges any time soon. The status quo of muddling through without a coherent and predictable global strategy is therefore going to persist for the time being. Minilateral responses and cooperation schemes such as the Normandy format on Ukraine, the P5+1 coalition on Iran, PESCO and the European Intervention Initiative will likely increase, thus running the risk of sending mixed messages and further undermining European cohesion and the EU's internal and external credibility as a global actor. The biggest item on the to-do list for the near future will thus be to try and restore trust and confidence in the EU and its added value from the perspective of its member states and its allies. If this endeavour fails, two negative trends will reinforce each other: the more individual EU member states see or present the EU as just another source of conflict rather than the solution to shared challenges, the more fragmented policies will become and the less reliable the EU will be on the global stage. Accordingly, the EU and its member states must optimise their coordination of national policies and minilateral responses. They have to step up their efforts

to strengthen global multilateral structures – or rather prevent them from collapsing – so that EU governance structures and principles can survive in their current form. Last but not least, member states have to deliver on their commitments in order to establish predictability and reliability. Only then does it make sense to come up with a new EU global strategy in the future.

## II. Europe's architecture of security in the current strategic environment. Taking the path toward »strategic autonomy«

Morgan Paglia

The past decade and its uninterrupted chain of strategic disruptions have toppled some of Europe's most deeply rooted paradigms. Among them, the faith in »soft power«, deemed solely capable of diffusing progressive ideas and transforming societies, seems far removed from today's perspective.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the persistence of non-traditional security threats posed by terrorist networks, piracy in cyberspace and hybrid warfare, the very concept of a rules-based international order is being questioned by an increasing number of state actors that promote a radically different conception of international relations. While acknowledging the benefits of globalisation, they claim their »legitimate« right to carve out their own spheres of influence in a 19<sup>th</sup>-century fashion.

This dimension – which is often referred to as a »double standard« discourse – has manifested itself in a number of recent violations of international law. Russia's »fait accompli« in Crimea (2014) and the subsequent destabilisation of eastern Ukraine took EU member states by surprise and revealed that Europe was not immune to the threat of a high-intensity conflict on its doorstep.<sup>2</sup> Economic sanctions did not prove sufficient to deter or reverse these aggressive actions. Examples from other regions of the world also support the idea that the strategic order after the Cold War is quickly eroding, suggesting that this is a global phenomenon. China's annexation policy in the South China Sea and the withdrawal by the US from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) are hallmarks of this trend. That said, numerous initiatives have been undertaken in Europe since 2016 to address the risks posed by this evolving environment. The EU Global Strategy published in December 2016 is the cornerstone of Europe's efforts to take new steps in defence and security matters. Since then, a broader rethinking of European

military capabilities and readiness has taken place within the framework of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the establishment of a European Defence Fund, which both aim to improve pooling of resources. The European Intervention Initiative (EI2), which is geared to joint planning and exchanges of officers in order to frame a common threat perception, is equally important. Can this nascent European defence become the backbone of a truly militarily independent Europe, or will it only lead to a limited increase in autonomy from the US? This issue has fuelled an intense debate on both sides of the Atlantic. Most analysts, however, consider this question to be premature since practical issues related to European strategic autonomy – harmonisation of equipment, the definition of common strategic goals, capability shortfalls – are very far from being answered.<sup>3</sup>

### »Unwavering« US support called into question

Europe's turn to strategic autonomy appears as the result of various dynamics involving the transatlantic bond. In the short term, one major driving factor was America's manifest efforts to reduce its military presence in Europe. This perception, already noticeable under the Obama administration in the form of its famous »rebalancing« strategy toward Asia (»pivot to Asia«), has amplified under Obama's successor. President Trump's brutal shifts and erratic decisions – epitomised by the US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement with Iran (JCPOA), or by casting doubt on US support for NATO's article V – have called many founding principles of the Euro-Atlantic alliance into question. Observers such as Benjamin Haddad and Alina Polyakova thus reckon that »from Trump's tariffs [...] to calling the EU a »foe«, no U.S. president since World War

<sup>1</sup> Barbara Kunz, After the end of the end of History: What Europe should learn from the Ukraine crisis for its foreign relations. Genshagener Papiere N° 15, Genshagen: Stiftung Genshagen, December 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> See Corentin Brustlein, European Strategic Autonomy: Balancing Ambition and Autonomy, Editoriaux de l'Ifri, Paris: Ifri, November 2018.

It has appeared so distant, even hostile, to European interests.<sup>4</sup> More recently, the US withdrawal from the INF treaty revealed even more clearly how fragile and dependent Europe's security architecture actually is. This move prompted the French President to call for the formation of a «European army»<sup>5</sup>, a position he had to water down only shortly afterwards by reasserting the need to first improve the distribution of the financial burden within NATO. Many observers in France noted that this posture – although interesting – is unrealistic considering the current state and potential of Europe's armed forces.<sup>6</sup>

## An evolving threat: European armed forces at a crossroads

Over the past three decades, European countries enjoyed both the benefits of the post-Cold War «peace dividend» and military supremacy, although mostly as America's «wingmen» in US-led coalitions. After the undisputable military success of the 1990/1991 Gulf War, the unimpeded access that European armed forces had in each operational theatre led to a feeling of invulnerability that was not challenged, neither in former Yugoslavia and Iraq, nor in Libya. Nevertheless, long-term dynamics and experiences from more recent conflicts show that it has become increasingly difficult for European countries to conduct expeditionary

interventions.<sup>7</sup> Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the capacity developments of emerging military powers have focused on areas most suitable for efficiently contesting NATO capabilities. Most of these systems (known as anti-access/area denial or A2/AD systems) aim to undermine essential prerequisites for the deployment of an expeditionary force (such as aerial superiority). Accordingly, important advances have been achieved in the development of sophisticated surface-to-air missiles (SAM, or MANPADs)<sup>8</sup> as a means to challenge aerial superiority. Other systems have emerged in the realm of electronic warfare, anti-satellite capabilities and conventional ballistic missiles. This modernisation has also benefited from the global diffusion of information technologies, which have considerably enhanced the reliability, performance and resilience of these systems. This phenomenon of «democratisation of destruction»<sup>9</sup> appears as the direct result of the (re)emergence of military powers (including Russia, China and Israel) capable and willing to diffuse cheaper and more reliable weapons systems on the market than in the past.<sup>10</sup> An increasing array of non-state actors from guerrillas to drug cartels, which until now did not have access to these modern systems, can also acquire and use them. This has therefore led to the development of hybrid actors capable of acting clandestinely as terrorist or guerilla groups but also able to conduct military standoffs against state-actors.<sup>11</sup> First extensively studied by US strategists and think tankers, this trend has gained traction in Europe in the aftermath of Crimea's annexation by Russia. The process that led to the takeover of the peninsula –

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Haddad/Alina Polyakova, *Is Going It Alone the Best Way Forward for Europe?*, 17 October 2018, [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2018-10-17/going-it-alone-best-way-forward-europe?utm\\_source=tw&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=daily\\_soc](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2018-10-17/going-it-alone-best-way-forward-europe?utm_source=tw&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=daily_soc), retrieved on 10 July 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Armée européenne: Macron joue l'apaisement avec Trump en parlant d'une « confusion », in: *Le Monde* (online), 15 November 2018, [https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2018/11/09/donald-trump-denonce-les-propos-insultants-de-macron-sur-une-armee-europeenne\\_5381558\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2018/11/09/donald-trump-denonce-les-propos-insultants-de-macron-sur-une-armee-europeenne_5381558_3210.html), retrieved on 10 July 2019.

<sup>6</sup> La paix en Europe passe-t-elle par une armée commune ?, *Table ronde d'actualité internationale*, France Culture, 9 November 2018, <https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/cultures-monde/culturesmonde-du-vendredi-09-novembre-2018>, retrieved on 10 July 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Corentin Brustlein, *Entry Operations and the Future of Strategic Autonomy*, *Focus Stratégique* N° 70 bis, December 2017, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> See Elie Tenenbaum/Jean-Christophe Noël/Morgan Paglia, *Les armées françaises face aux menaces anti-aériennes de nouvelle génération*, *Focus Stratégique* N° 86., Paris: Ifri, December 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Keprinevitch, *Security Challenge and Resources – Maritime Strategy in a Contested Environment*, Newport: US Naval War College, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Tenenbaum/Noël/Paglia, *Les armées françaises face aux menaces anti-aériennes de nouvelle génération* (see footnote 8), p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> Elie Tenenbaum, *Le piège de la guerre hybride*, *Focus Stratégique* N° 63, Paris: Ifri, October 2015, p. 8.

spearheaded by a group of »little green men« – was quickly followed by the settlement of A2/AD capabilities (SAM and anti-ship missiles) used to lock up the situation and deter any military action.<sup>12</sup> In an interview, Vladimir Putin made it clear that he wanted to turn Crimea into a »fortress from both land and sea«, adding that »as for our nuclear forces: they are constantly on combat alert anyway«.<sup>13</sup>

## Adjusting the resources dedicated to defence

Therefore, given the current set of challenges the European armed forces are facing, as Corentin Brustlein has noted, »strategic autonomy is less about conducting a foreign and security policy in total political and military isolation from the United States than it is about being able to decide upon [...] one's own fate«<sup>14</sup>. Such autonomy could, however, hardly be obtained without increasing the scale of the European financial outlay and military engagement, an issue that had been a bone of contention between Europe and the US already during President Obama's tenure, and now also under President Trump. However, as has been stressed by researchers Barbara Kunz and Lisa Brandt, within NATO the bulk of the financial outlay related to operational activities is not supported by the Alliance itself – whose budget amounts to roughly two billion euros annually – but weighs directly on the finances of the

participating member states.<sup>15</sup> Sharing the burden, therefore, depends on the proportion of the nation's finances and its political will. We can assess the current level of expenditure required by observing the evolution of military expenses in Europe over the past 30 years. By 2017, on the continent, they barely amounted to 60% of their 1988 level (342 billion compared to 554 billion US dollars<sup>16</sup> according to a SIPRI report<sup>17</sup>). Over the same period, worldwide military expenses increased by 70%, mostly in Asia. This gives us an insight into the »catch up« phenomenon described above.

## Strategic challenges arising in Asia

In addition to the existing threats on its doorstep, Europe needs to anticipate potential risks posed by tensions and threats in Asia.<sup>18</sup> All too often, the question of the rivalry between Washington and Beijing is excluded from the strategic debate(s). This issue, although widely acknowledged as being central, is deemed to be too far removed from current European priorities.

From a European standpoint, China's increasing clout in economic and upcoming military and security affairs does not appear as a direct threat but poses lasting questions and doubts regarding the transatlantic relationship. While China's strategic emergence has become a major issue of concern in the US, European countries have responded very differently to a more coercive US policy. Only a handful of countries (among them the UK, France and Germany) have sought to

<sup>12</sup> Howard Colby/Ruslan Pukhov/Anton Lavrov, Russian Again: The Military Operation for Crimea, in: Howard Colby/Ruslan Pukhov/Anton Lavrov (eds.), Brothers armed: military aspects of the crisis in Ukraine, Minneapolis: East View Press, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Crimea: way back home, in: Russia Insight (YouTube Channel), 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Mw4Y9jRwCQ>, retrieved on 10 July 2019. Since then, another A2/AD »bubble« emerged in Kaliningrad, posing a direct threat to air forces operating in the region. Christopher Harpe/Tony Lawrence/Sven Sakkov, Air Defence in the Baltic States, Tallinn: International Center for Defense and Security, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Brustlein, »European Strategic Autonomy« (see footnote 7).

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Kunz/Lisa Brandt, Transatlantic Relations in a multipolar world. French and German perspectives on security and trade affairs, Genshagener Papiere No. 11, Genshagen: Stiftung Genshagen, April 2013, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> At constant 2016 US dollar prices.

<sup>17</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military expenditure by region in constant US dollars, 1988–2017, [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/4\\_Data%20for%20world%20regions%20from%201988-2017.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/4_Data%20for%20world%20regions%20from%201988-2017.pdf), retrieved on 10 July 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Concerns are expressed both in the German and French White Papers and in the EU Global Strategy.

increase their military and diplomatic clout in Eastern Asia.<sup>19</sup> Others, such as Greece and Hungary – desperate for Chinese investments – have played an ambivalent role over the years by preventing the Union from adopting a common position on issues deemed embarrassing to Beijing (human rights and the South China Sea<sup>20</sup>, for example). This dynamic could become more problematic in the years to come as China's influence expands across the continent. China's Belt and Road Initiative could have strong appeal especially in the geographic area of the 16+1 format, a diplomatic platform bringing together countries from Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, alongside its current capability build-up, Europe should at least anticipate the potential implications for its security in a scenario of heightening tensions in Asia.

need a proper makeover, both in terms of resources and effective engagement on the ground. This increased engagement does not mean that Europe should become a global policeman or an interventionist power. Past crisis situations have shown that restraint can be more efficient than intervention – and having »the best hammer does not mean that every problem is a nail« (Barack Obama). However, having the capacity to intervene is critical. This dimension should prompt each one of Europe's member states to reconsider their level of engagement in security. Undoubtedly, strategic adjustments are needed for tackling emerging threats.

## **Proper makeover of Europe's defence urgently needed**

In a more uncertain world filled with various emerging powers, Europe appears to be a source of stability through its formal anchorage in the defence of liberal values. At the same time, it appears extremely fragile due to its manifest lack of means to defend these values.

Despite a high level of support for common security and defence on the part of its citizens – around 75% over the last ten years<sup>21</sup> – Europe's defence initiatives still

<sup>19</sup> Céline Pajon, France and Japan: the Indo-Pacific as a springboard for a strategic partnership, in: Luis Simón/Ulrich Speck (eds.), *Natural partners? Europe, Japan and security in the Indo-Pacific*, Elcano Policy Paper, Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, November 2018, pp. 11-14.

<sup>20</sup> Theresa Fallon, *The EU, the South China Sea, and China's Successful Wedge Strategy*, AMTI Update, Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 13 October 2016, <https://amti.csis.org/eu-south-china-sea-chinas-successful-wedge-strategy/>, retrieved on 10 July 2019.

<sup>21</sup> European Commission, *L'opinion des Européens sur les priorités de l'Union européenne*, Eurobaromètre Standard 89, Brussels: European Commission, Spring 2018, p. 5.

### III.

# The last defender of multilateralism? The EU's position in the 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>23</sup>

Friederike Richter

*»Nichts kommt von selbst. Und nur wenig ist von Dauer. Darum – besinnt Euch auf Eure Kraft und darauf, dass jede Zeit eigene Antworten will und man auf ihrer Höhe zu sein hat, wenn Gutes bewirkt werden soll.«*

**Willy Brandt<sup>23</sup>**

The end of the Second World War marked the beginning of a new and multifaceted international order. While geopolitical tensions between the Eastern and the Western bloc persisted until 1991, the post-World War II period was characterised by economic openness and collective efforts to promote peace and the rule of law. With the United States (US) providing hegemonic leadership, fostering cooperation and advocating »free world« values, the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a proliferation of regional and international organisations: indeed, a number of multilateral institutions were founded, including the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) – the predecessor of the European Union (EU) – and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). After the end of the Cold War, this order continued to spread, and countries in East Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America became increasingly integrated into the global economy. Thus, new international organisations were created (e.g. the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 and the G20 in 1999) while pre-existing ones

<sup>22</sup> The research for this contribution received financial support from the French Ministry of the Armed Forces, Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy (DGRIS). Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in papers or publications by PhD students, who receive doctoral funding through the International Relations and Strategy programme, are those of the author(s) and do not reflect the official opinion of the French Ministry of the Armed Forces. Neither DGRIS nor the Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM) may be held responsible for the use that may be made of the information contained therein.

<sup>23</sup> »Nothing happens automatically. And only few things last. Therefore – be mindful of your strength, and of the fact that every era wants its own answers, and you have to be up to its speed in order to be able to do good.«, Willy Brandt, message to the Socialist International Congress in Berlin, Germany, September 1992.

continued to expand, both in terms of their size and fields of operation (such as the EU, which began as a purely economic community with six member states in 1958 and has now become an organisation consisting of 28 members that covers many policy areas, from environmental protection to external relations and security).

## Relations with Russia and China

The post-Cold War period also saw improving relations with Russia: while Russia joined the G7 and the WTO in 1997 and 2012, respectively, the NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security marked a milestone in international cooperation, explicitly stating that Russia and NATO »share the goal of overcoming the vestiges of earlier confrontation and competition and of strengthening mutual trust and cooperation«.<sup>24</sup> Although the 1990s and early 2000s suggested an overall improvement in relations between the former Eastern and Western blocs, several geopolitical developments – including the division within NATO over Kosovo in 1999 and Iraq in 2003, China's economic boom since 2001 and Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 – started to call the stability and longevity of this new post-Cold War order into question. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was a severe breach of the international order and constituted a turning point in the current strategic environment. Besides the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine, Russian support of the Assad regime in 2015, which directly opposed European and US objectives to restore stability in Syria, and the interference of Russia in several elections, including the 2016 US presidential election, led to geopolitical tensions the likes of which had not been seen since the end of the Cold War.

<sup>24</sup> NATO, Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation, May 1997, p. 3.

Russia is currently not the only source of tension, however. On the back of a soaring economy, China – which joined the WTO in 2001 – started to invest heavily in the modernisation of its armed forces and enhanced anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capacities. Under Xi Jinping, President of the People’s Republic of China since 2013, China expanded its foreign policy assertiveness. It launched the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, founded the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank in 2014, increased its military presence in the East and South China Sea, and stepped up its presence in Africa by opening its first overseas military installation in Djibouti in 2017. In addition, China cooperates with Russia to an increasing extent: while the two countries have organised joint military exercises for more than a decade, China’s People’s Liberation Army joined the quadrennial Vostok exercises in Russia for the first time in 2018. Those exercises used to prepare the Russian armed forces for a possible conflict with China. At a time of strained relations with the West (for China and Russia), they suggest an increasingly close – albeit informal – cooperation that may impact regional and international politics in the future.

## US influence on the multilateral framework

In addition to these shifts in the balance of power and global governance, the US elected a president in 2016 who is openly hostile to the liberal world order that characterises the post-World War II period. Donald Trump criticises a number of the values, norms and procedures enshrined in international institutions, thereby challenging existing forms of cooperation. Among other things, he has questioned the principle of free trade enshrined in the WTO, called on NATO

members to share the burden of the Alliance, and has withdrawn from several international agreements, including the nuclear agreement with Iran and the Paris Climate Agreement. While the 2017 National Security Strategy underlines the commitment of the US to its European partners, the UN and NATO, it also finds that »China and Russia challenge American power, influence and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity«.<sup>25</sup> Such geopolitical developments may have far-reaching consequences for multilateral cooperation, which seems to have been taken for granted in the past, in particular since the end of the Cold War. This, in turn, is particularly worrisome for the EU, whose very existence is based on multilateralism, given that it seems to emerge as the sole remaining defender of highly institutionalised and permanent cooperative settings in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Developments in the EU

In line with the 2016 EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy, »the EU is [indeed] committed to a global order based on international law, including the principles of the UN Charter, which ensure peace, human rights, sustainable development and lasting access to the global commons. This commitment translates into an aspiration to transform rather than simply preserve the existing system. The EU will strive for a strong UN as the bedrock of the multilateral rules-based order, and develop globally coordinated responses with international and regional organisations, states and non-state actors«.<sup>26</sup> While the EU aims to transform the current international system, it faces several challenges in doing so. These challenges not only emanate from outside of the bloc (i.e. through power competition and a certain fatigue of

<sup>25</sup> National Security Strategy of the United States of America, December 2017, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy, June 2016, p. 10.

multilateralism), but also arise within the EU. The rise of national populist movements such as Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége (Fidesz), the former Front National (FN, now Rassemblement National, RN), Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) and the UK Independence Party (UKIP) increasingly question the *raison d'être* of the union. Given that most of these parties openly criticise the institutional design and working methods of the EU, it is crucial for member states to defend the purpose of multilateralism. Doing so is, however, increasingly difficult at a time in which the third largest contributing country to the EU budget, the UK, is about to leave the Union.

Even though the Brexit negotiations continue to keep Brussels and London busy, the shifting geopolitical context currently provides new strategic opportunities for common action at the EU level, in particular in the realm of foreign, security and defence policy. Following the migration crisis and a series of terrorist attacks on European soil that started in 2015, security started to be a top concern of citizens and became a priority for many countries across the EU once again. This »window of opportunity« resulted, among other things, in the abovementioned 2016 EU Global Strategy, the establishment of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) for the command of military non-executive missions and the (somewhat belated) activation of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) in 2017. Due to the diminishing reliability of some of its traditional key allies, the EU additionally created a European Defence Fund in the summer of 2018 in order to enhance the competitiveness of European defence and the EU's strategic autonomy.

While it could be argued that systemic defence cooperation is about to become a reality, we should keep in mind the fact that multilateral action in the realm of

European security and defence policy has never been very smooth. On the contrary, closer defence cooperation seems to come in waves. Indeed, the first attempts to cooperate in »high politics« failed in the 1950s and 1960s (cf. Treaty of Dunkirk, the Treaty of Brussels, European Defence Community, the European Political Community and the Fouchet Plan, for example). EU member states therefore scaled down their ambitions and tried to coordinate their foreign policies instead. Those negotiations led to the European Political Cooperation in 1970, the Single European Act in 1986 and the Maastricht Treaty, which eventually established the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in 1992. The 1990s and early 2000s then witnessed a »golden era« for EU defence cooperation, marked by the launch of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) in 1998 and the creation of several institutions, agencies and services (such as the European Defence Agency (EDA) and the European External Action Service (EEAS)). This phase did not last very long, however. Between 2008 and 2015, government priorities shifted once again towards domestic politics due to the economic crisis. Given that the Treaty of Lisbon did not extend the use of qualified majority voting to defence matters, EU defence policy depends on member states' willingness to cooperate. Defence cooperation in Europe will therefore most likely continue to ebb and flow over time.

Since EU member states still need to develop a swift and resilient mechanism for defence cooperation (in particular in times of economic hardship and general elections that tend to push defence issues from government agendas), recent initiatives on defence cooperation at the EU level should be highly welcomed. If the EU wants to preserve the prerogatives of multilateralism (such as shared principles, diffuse reciprocity, legitimacy and common public goods), it will have to

innovate and allow for more flexible forms of cooperation at the bi-, mini- and multinational level (such as PESCO, which is an enhanced form of cooperation that does not require all EU member states to participate). This need for greater flexibility holds true for security and defence cooperation, and also for other policy areas. Nevertheless, the risks associated with such a diversification of the formats in which states cooperate with/within the EU are not negligible. If international agreements become more flexible, it will indeed be more difficult for the EU to ensure their coherence and enforcement over time. Less institutionalised settings could thus lead to a mismatch of objectives and investments, overlapping agreements and duplication, for instance. This, in turn, would favour a multi-speed Europe and could potentially weaken the position of the Union in the current global strategic environment.

policy objectives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This may be through multilateralism, or more flexible forms of international cooperation that may – over time – help to overcome differences in national interests.

## **The EU needs to focus on its foundational principles**

To conclude, recent (geo)political developments show that the domestic situations of several key actors in the international arena, including China, the EU, Russia and the US, have been undergoing significant shifts in the past five years and that relations between those actors have also started to change. While the EU may seem to emerge as the sole remaining defender of highly institutionalised and permanent cooperative settings, it still remains to be seen whether the current fatigue of multilateralism will lead to a permanent reorganisation of global governance. The EU therefore needs to keep focusing on its foundational principles of democracy, human rights, peace and the rule of law, while continuing to develop adequate economic, diplomatic and military means to reach its foreign

## About the authors

**Anna-Lena Kirch** is a Research Associate at the Centre for International Security Policy (CISP) at the Hertie School of Governance and works on Polish-German relations in the area of security and defence. Further research interests of hers include EU governance and European differentiation processes, Central-Eastern European cooperation formats such as the Visegrád Group, and German foreign policy. Prior to this, she worked at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), the German Marshall Fund of the United States, the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) and the European Parliament. She is currently completing her PhD at the Justus Liebig University in Gießen with a focus on »sub-regional cooperation formats in the EU«.

**Morgan Paglia** is a research fellow at the French Institute of International Relations (Ifri) and a PhD candidate at the Catholic University of Paris. Prior to joining Ifri, he graduated from the Political Studies Institutes of Aix-en-Provence and Sciences Po Toulouse. His special interests are great power competition in East Asia and the strategic debates in Europe and the US.

**Friederike Richter** is a PhD candidate in Political Science at the Center for Political Research (CEVIPOF) and a Teaching Assistant at the École d'Affaires publiques as well as at the Paris School of International Affairs (Sciences Po, Paris). She is also associated with the Institut de recherche stratégique de l'École militaire (IRSEM). Before starting her PhD, Friederike Richter worked for the European Commission and a public affairs consultancy in Brussels. Her research, which is currently funded by the French Ministry of the Armed Forces, deals with agenda setting in security and defence policy in France and the UK. She also works on defence cooperation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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[institut@stiftung-genshagen.de](mailto:institut@stiftung-genshagen.de)

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